



STATE SENATOR JIM MERRITT

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Fellow Taxpayers:

Please know that I cut costs and saved valuable tax dollars on this important mailing to you by reducing its size and posting additional info on my Web site.

J.M.

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SEN. MERRITT: BILLS I SUPPORTED THIS SESSION

✓ **INDEPENDENT RESEARCH:** In an effort to make the legislative branch less dependent on lobbyists for research on public policy topics, Senate Enrolled Act 84 allows legislators and the non-partisan Legislative Services Agency (LSA) to access state-funded research resources at state colleges and universities. It also requests that LSA conduct a survey on the feasibility of establishing a division of research and policy development within the agency.

✓ **SCHOOL EMPLOYEE RECORDS:** I authored a bill this session aimed at making it tougher for teachers with prior records of misconduct to hide their backgrounds. Senate Bill 242, which failed to pass, would have required school districts to disclose substantiated disciplinary reports to the Indiana Department of Education. SB 242 would have also allowed school boards to suspend teachers without pay while the district investigates a substantiated report of misconduct. Under my proposal, a school district would be required to immediately pay back wages and benefits if a teacher is exonerated from misconduct charges.

✓ **School Funding Flexibility:** House Enrolled Act 1367 provides schools the flexibility to claim money normally dedicated to capital projects and use it for instructional purposes. Schools agreeing to pay freezes for staff would be allowed to transfer more money. This measure will provide nearly \$82 million statewide to prevent school employee layoffs and help preserve instructional programs.



✓ **Costly, Crowded Prisons:** Senate Enrolled Act 415 eases the burden on Indiana's over-crowded correctional facilities and saves tax dollars. Every year of incarceration costs taxpayers at least \$20,000 per inmate. SEA 415 allows parole boards to consider early discharges for long-term, non-violent offenders who have been incarcerated for 21 consecutive years and have completed a four-year college degree or other approved community transition program.



SEN. JIM MERRITT

SERVING SENATE DISTRICT 31 TAXPAYERS



JOBS: LAWMAKERS FIGHT NEW SPENDING, NEW TAXES; PASS PRO-JOBS INITIATIVES TO HELP HOOSIERS

With little time and no money, lawmakers worked this short session to maintain Indiana's pro-job climate of low taxes and limited regulation.

Senators kept a close, careful eye on proposed legislation and amendments to avoid new state expenditures and government intervention that would have raised taxes and imposed red tape during already hard times for Indiana's workforce and employers.

Gov. Mitch Daniels, with the support of Senate Republicans, rightly reacted to tumbling state revenues by cutting government spending, flat-lining state payrolls and freezing all but essential hiring. To date, state bureaucracies have cut 20 percent from operating budgets. Reluctantly, higher education funding has been reduced 6 percent and public K-12 schools – nearly half of the state budget – have been asked to find 3 percent in new cost savings and efficiencies to help save classroom teachers' jobs.

Senators also successfully delayed \$400 million in new unem-

ployment insurance premiums from going into effect in 2010. By avoiding premium increases, lawmakers hope employers large and small will be in stronger positions to retain or add employees.

Lawmakers also passed initiatives to help Hoosiers recover from the national recession:

- **New Employer Tax Credits** will be offered to businesses relocating or incorporating in Indiana. Qualified businesses must hire 10 or more full-time employees, not including owners.

- **Small Business Tax Credits** will be expanded to make small employers with fewer than 35 workers eligible for Economic Development for a Growing Economy (EDGE) credits.

- **Small Business Ombudsman** will be an advocate for small employers with state agencies, helping navigate regulations, streamline paperwork and coordinate due dates. Also, the ombudsman will monitor outdated, ineffective and overly burdensome reporting requests and red tape.

- **H.I.R.E.** (Helping Indiana Re-start Employment) initiative will offer tax incentives to employers who hire and train unemployed and underemployed Hoosiers.



Voters in November will decide if property tax caps will be added to state Constitution – once and for all

Hoosier voters in November's general election will determine if permanent caps on property tax rates will be added to the Indiana Constitution.

Members of the Indiana Senate and House of Representatives this session have given final passage to a resolution that would constitutionally cap property tax rates at 1 percent for owner-occupied homes, 2 percent for other residential and agricultural properties and 3 percent for businesses.

This historic tax reform effort sets the stage to add the 1-2-3 caps to Indiana's Constitution. In order to change the state constitution, an amendment must be passed by two separately-elected sessions of the Indiana General Assembly and then approved by voters.

Immediately after a property tax crisis that sent tax bills skyrocketing and hordes of homeowners to the Statehouse demanding reforms, senators and House members in 2008 passed the

phased-in property tax caps into law and started the constitutional amendment process. The Republican-led Senate kept momentum for the amendment by passing it again in 2009, but the caps did not receive a vote last year in the Democrat-controlled House.

This year's action by both the Senate and House proves lawmakers are once again siding with taxpayers and not tax spenders – keeping the promise of permanent property tax relief and reform.



Because lawmakers successfully passed the amendment through both chambers, Hoosier voters will have the final say on Nov. 2.